

**ILLINOIS STATE UNIVERSITY
EAF DEPARTMENT – Fall 2009**

PK-12 Ed.D. DISSERTATION OPTIONS

Since 1962, the Department of Educational Administration and Foundations (EAF) at Illinois State University (ISU) has prepared leaders for schools and districts. Our students and alumni frequently tell us that ISU has a strong reputation. We are informed by the work of teaching and learning scholar, Lee Shulman, as we seek to deepen our own practice as professors and that of our students as the leaders of schools and districts. We see the possibility of scholarship in practice and the practice of scholarship as inseparable and seek to develop in new school leaders a “wisdom of practice” for Illinois schools. In this spirit we have defined four dissertation options for PK-12 Ed.D. students: Traditional Research Dissertation, Program Evaluation Dissertation, Policy Formation Dissertation, and Organizational Problem Analysis Dissertation.

The first Ph.D. in education was offered in 1893 at Teachers College, Columbia University, and the first Ed.D. was offered in 1920 at Harvard University. In 1931 the field produced its first study on the wisdom of granting the Ed.D. as opposed to the Ph.D., and by the 1960s the popularity of the Ed.D. degree began to decline. Currently Ph.D. programs outnumber Ed.D. programs (Shulman, Golde, Bueschel, & Garabedian, 2006). Reform efforts frequently focus on distinguishing the Ph.D. from the Ed.D. through differentiating goals and requirements. “Nevertheless, the capstone requirement is some form of dissertation, although practitioners are unlikely ever to be asked to produce research like it again” (Shulman et al., 2006, p. 27). Although a traditional research dissertation is typically completed by approximately 2,000 candidates for the Ed.D. annually, numerous universities have begun to offer alternative capstone assessments. These alternatives include both individual and collaborative projects.

We believe that *Critical Analysis* in leadership is characterized by thoughtful analysis that links scholarship and practical application. Scholarship is treated comprehensively to address the problems of renewing our educational system for the 21st century. *Practical Wisdom* is leadership performance characterized through developed implications of scholarship *FOR* practice in both general and particular terms. Scholarship and the craft wisdom of practice are treated dynamically and systemically. It is to this level of performance that we all aspire, the level at which our schools and EAF join together to share responsibility for creating a 21st century educational system. The four Ed.D. dissertation options, based on emerging practice in educational leadership programs, are briefly described on the following pages, and complete descriptions of the four options are presented as attachments. Each requires a significant commitment of time and effort to produce an extended piece of writing. Preparation of the final written product will require extended review of bodies of literature relevant to the project. These dissertation options extend opportunities for students to demonstrate *Critical Analysis* and *Practical Wisdom* in the culminating assessment of the EAF program.

Reference

Shulman, L. S., Golde, C. M., Bueschel, A. C., & Garabedian, K. J. (2006 April). Reclaiming education’s doctorates: A critique and a proposal. *Educational Researcher*, 25-32.

Designing Dissertation Options

The redesigned program that creates an engaged educational leader through renewed curriculum and instruction must demonstrate *Practical Wisdom* in the culminating assessment of the proposed program, the dissertation. We propose four alternatives based on emerging practice in educational leadership programs.

Alternative Ed. D. Dissertations for EAF	
1. Traditional Research Dissertation	2. Program Evaluation Dissertation
3. Policy Formation Dissertation	4. Organizational Problem Analysis Dissertation

Each of the four dissertation options will be briefly described below and a complete description of the four options will be presented as attachments.

1. Traditional Research Dissertation

The “research dissertation” is a genre, and deserves inclusion as an option for Ed.D. students particularly interested in producing knowledge in response to a research problem from within a disciplinary or theoretical perspective. The quantitative research dissertation may seek to test or generate hypotheses or to establish generalizable propositions. The qualitative research dissertation may seek to explain phenomena or events by exploring the multiple meanings experienced by individuals, to explore and advance theory, or advance an argument. Mixed methods research dissertations involve both collecting and analyzing quantitative and qualitative data to provide a better understanding of a research problem through more comprehensive evidence than if either dataset had been used alone. Students undertaking the traditional research dissertation are expected to have taken the appropriate courses in educational research methodology.

2. Program Evaluation Dissertation

The “program evaluation dissertation” is a genre, and deserves inclusion as an option for Ed.D. students particularly interested in exploring the effectiveness of educational interventions and developing implications for practice. The Program Evaluation Dissertation will identify, clarify, and apply defensible criteria to determine the effectiveness of an educational program, project, process, policy, or product. In every case, the program evaluation is intended to improve student learning and achievement. The program evaluation dissertation must address a significant program that involves sizeable budget expenditures and affects a substantial number of people. The program evaluation dissertation will use accepted evaluation

models, methods, and accepted practices. When program evaluations are done well they have the scope and depth of a traditional dissertation. Students undertaking the program evaluation dissertation are expected to have taken the appropriate courses in evaluation research methodology and assessment of learning.

3. Policy Formation Dissertation

The “policy formation dissertation” is a genre, and deserves inclusion as an option for Ed.D. students interested in impacting education issues through the review, research, and development of educational policy. This option begins with the review of an educational issue ranging from federal involvement in public education to accountability and standards to something as specific as vouchers or charter schools. Through this review new or revised policy recommendations and implications are developed by considering internal requirements, external requirements, existing policy, and stakeholder recommendations. Methodologies for data collection and analysis most useful in completing a policy formation dissertation include quantitative methods, educational assessment, legal research, historiography, and document analysis. Policy formation dissertations include implementation plans, possibly with the cooperation of the Illinois State University Center for the Study of Education Policy.

4. Organizational Problem Analysis Dissertation

The “organizational problem analysis dissertation” is a genre, and deserves inclusion as an option for Ed.D. students particularly interested in exploring an issue, problem, or need in a school or district to develop and implement plans for improving organizational effectiveness. The focus is ultimately on improving student learning and achievement. Tasks and skills used in an organizational problem analysis (OPA) dissertation include: understanding and using local data sources; using data to evaluate and document performance; using research to guide decisions; identifying/prioritizing organizational needs; understanding the structure and logic of problem definitions; establishing an improvement vision and performance goals; analyzing causes systemically and objectively; employing multiple perspectives in causal analyses; applying cost-benefit analyses, organizational values, and ethical criteria to solutions; and using appropriate technologies to support problem analysis, decision making, and communication. Students undertaking the OPA dissertation are expected to have taken the appropriate courses in educational research methodology. OPA dissertations will often require mixed quantitative and qualitative methodologies.

Traditional Research Dissertation

Explore the literature about a topic of interest for gaps in the knowledge base and for an appropriate theoretical perspective to determine if the topic is researchable.

[DETERMINATION OF TOPIC or IDENTIFICATION OF THE NEED]

Is the problem of significance to study?

NO? Stop and go back to first step, choose another topic and repeat.
YES? Proceed to next step.

Construct a framework that encompasses knowledge claims, inquiry strategies, and specific methods. Make design choices based on the purpose of the study and the research questions.

[METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH]

Narrow the topic, frame the research problem within the existing literature, develop a purpose statement and research questions, and construct a comprehensive literature map based on an organized and focused review.

[LITERATURE REVIEW]

ANTICIPATE ETHICAL ISSUES AND SEEK IRB APPROVAL

PROPOSAL HEARING – MUST BE APPROVED BEFORE PROCEEDING

[DATA COLLECTION AND DATA ANALYSIS]

Organize Findings
[SYNTHESIS OF RESEARCH RESULTS]

Develop conclusions, assess significance, and make recommendations for further study.
[CONCLUSION]

Program Evaluation Dissertation

Identification of effectiveness of a significant educational program, project, process, policy, or product.
[DETERMINATION OF TOPIC or IDENTIFICATION OF THE NEED]

Assessing potential methods to address the need
Organizational issues-Internal and external issues
Best practices to meet the need-Alternative approaches to program evaluation
[LITERATURE REVIEW]

Is the problem of significance to study?

NO? Stop and go back to first step, choose another topic and repeat.
YES? Proceed to next step.

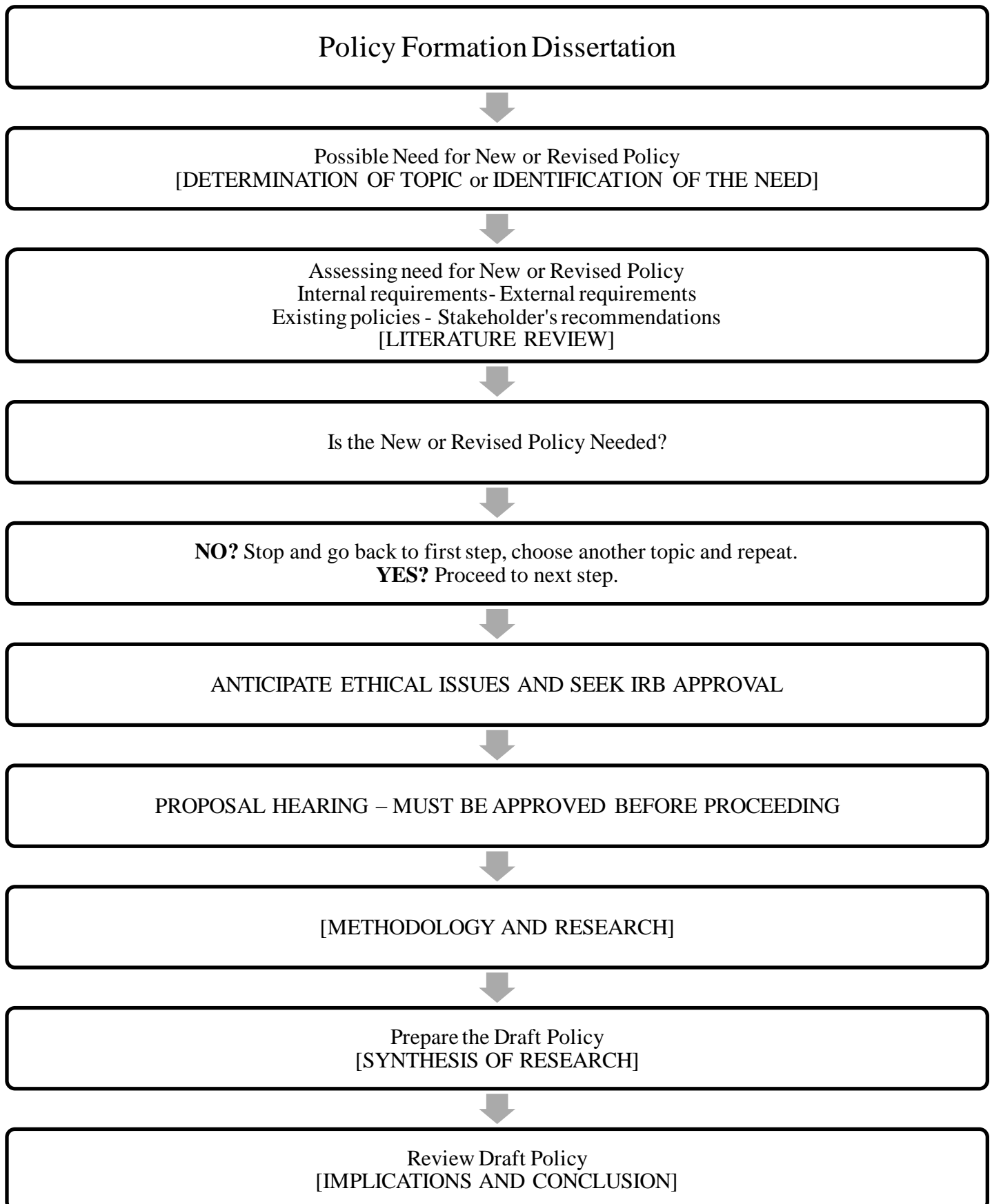
ANTICIPATE ETHICAL ISSUES AND SEEK IRB APPROVAL

PROPOSAL HEARING – MUST BE APPROVED BEFORE PROCEEDING

Determine requirements and develop criteria for determining the solution.
[METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH]

Prepare the draft evaluation report.
[SYNTHESIS OF RESEARCH]

Review the draft report and implementation plan with stakeholders where the evaluation was conducted.
[IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSION]



Organizational Problem Analysis Dissertation



Identification of an organizational issue, problem, or need
[DETERMINATION OF TOPIC or IDENTIFICATION OF THE NEED]



Assessing potential methods to address the need
Organizational issues- Internal and external issues
Best practices to meet the need
[LITERATURE REVIEW]



Is the problem of significance to study?



NO? Stop and go back to first step, choose another topic and repeat.
YES? Proceed to next step.



Determine requirements and develop criteria for determining the solution.
[METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH]



ANTICIPATE ETHICAL ISSUES AND SEEK IRB APPROVAL



PROPOSAL HEARING – MUST BE APPROVED BEFORE PROCEEDING



Prepare the draft solution and implementation plan.
[SYNTHESIS OF RESEARCH]



Review the draft solution and implementation plan with stakeholders where the analysis was performed.
[IMPLICATIONS AND CONCLUSION]